



History and Heritage on the Table: How Slavery Impacted Southern Cooking

Image credit: Michael W. Twitty, @KosherSoul on Twitter

September is the USDA's National Ethnic Foods Month! And where in the country can boast as much food diversity as the South? From Creole to Soul the South has some of the best and boldest flavors in the country. What many people may not realize is that much of what is today considered Southern food actually has roots in West Africa, and the traditions that slaves kept alive upon being brought to the Americas.

For thousands of years the peoples of West Africa honed their agricultural skills and it was for these skills, in addition to their use as manual labor, that many were captured and sent to the Americas as slaves. In fact, many of the Southern food staples that we continue to grow today were brought over from the African continent. Yams, peanuts, watermelon, sorghum, okra, pumpkin, cucumber, black-eyed peas, collards, and even garlic were found indigenously in, but not necessarily native to, Africa thousands of years before the slave-trade made its way to the Americas. Once here slaves had to find a way to blend their cooking traditions and techniques with

Continued from page 1:

European ingredients and tastes with what was available.

The predominant pre-colonial diet among West African peoples was vegetarian mixed with small meat portions and spices added for flavor. Common food traditions that were translated to slave life in the Americas were deep-fried meals, okra as a thickening agent, and the heavy use of rice and leafy greens, such as collards, all of which are still used today in Southern cooking.

Due to the constraints imposed by slavery most Africans and African Americans during that era had to make the best use of whatever time they had. When it came to food this meant tending their own gardens to supplement their meager rations and preparing quick and easy meals that could be made with readily available foods or cast-offs from their owner's tables. Foods that could be eaten by hand, such as biscuits and **peanuts**, were advantageous because they could be eaten on the move.

Corn, too, was a huge part of a slave's diet beginning on the ships used to sail them from Africa to the Americas and was later used to make cornbread and cakes. Slaves also, "boiled the hauled and dried kernels of Indian corn (hominy), and ground them into a meal known as grits, a food similar to

HATTIE'S COLLARDS

2 1/2 quarts water
1 ham hock
1 1/2 lbs collards

Ham hocks and greens are truly examples of country cooking, known to some folks as "soul food."

Bring water and ham hock to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 1 1/2 hours or until tender. Meanwhile wash collards thoroughly. Remove stem and wash again. Add to tender ham hock broth and cook about 1 1/2 hours or until done. Season to taste and serve.

Recipe from SNHS members Monette R. Harrell and Robert W. Harrell, Jr.
Found in "The Ham Book" page 47



© 2011 by Evan-Amos, used under the Creative Commons CCO 1.0 Universal Public Domain Dedication

the African dish called *Eba*" (Holloway) Today, we eat grits for breakfast with our eggs and bacon (or as our Director's Texan grandmother would make: fried up with cheese!).

Watermelons are a popular summer fruit that was brought to the Americas from Africa. Slaves would sometimes plant watermelons among the cotton and corn fields to enjoy on a hot day while working then later pickle the rinds, a treat still enjoyed today (*See back page for recipe*). And you can't live in Suffolk and not be familiar with the importance of peanuts; they're everywhere! Here in Suffolk the peanut's claim to fame came specifically from Mr. Amedeo Obici and Mr. Peanut but the plant itself can't call the US home.

Although originally from South America, peanuts were brought to Africa by the Portuguese in the 1500s. Boiled peanuts, a Southern classic, can also be traced back to Africa. Boiling peanuts was a common cooking practice and traditionally done when the peanuts were too green to bake. Boiled peanuts never caught on nationwide like their roasted counterpart but continue to remain popular across the South, particularly in the Carolinas. Both peanut pie and peanut soup can also trace their origins back to the American slaves. Peanuts were then, as they are now, a good source of nutrition.

SUGAR COATED PEANUTS

6 cups raw peanuts
3 cups sugar
1 ½ cups water
5-6 drops of red food coloring

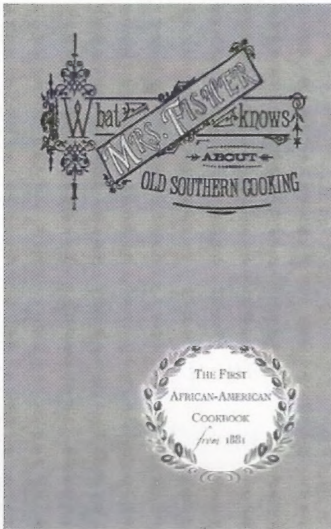
Put all ingredients into a black frying pan and cook over medium heat until sugar gets hard and sticks to peanuts. Immediately dump onto aluminum foil lined cookie sheet. Bake at 250° for 60-70 minutes until done.

Mary Holland Joyner, Grandmother of Shirley Boyette Rudin, SNHS member



Clockwise from top left: "Fresh roasted jumbo peanuts" bag from SNHS collection; Hamblin Studio photo of African-American women working in a peanut field, SNHS collection; Planters "Sal-In-Shell" peanut bag from SNHS collection; Hamblin Studio photo of African-American men working in W.M. McCann's peanut field, SNHS collection

Unfortunately while a few, “pre-1860 texts occasionally give first names of plantation cooks, [...]most remain anonymous” (scholarworks article). One former slave and cook whose name we do know is Mrs. Abby Fisher who in 1881 published her cookbook, “What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking: Soups, Pickles, Preserves, Etc.”



MRS. FISHER'S BREAKFAST CORNBREAD

One tea-cup of rice boiled nice and soft, to one and a half tea-cupful of corn meal mixed together, then stir the whole until light; one teaspoonful of salt, one tablespoonful of lard or butter, three eggs, half tea-cup of sweet milk.

The rice must be mixed into the meal while hot; can be baked either in muffin cups or a pan.

Mrs. Fisher is believed to have lived as a slave in South Carolina before moving to San Francisco, C.A., after the end of the Civil War. Mrs. Fisher's cookbook is a rare example of both black and white cooking and the oldest African American published cookbook in the United States.

By maintaining food preparation methods and

blending traditional West African ingredients with those found in the Americas slaves were able to fight against their oppression in a small, albeit meaningful, way to create an identity for themselves. In so doing they have forever changed the food and culture in the South. And given the popularity of Soul and Creole food across the nation our taste buds say, “Thank you!”

Sources:

<http://scholarworks.umass.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1782&context=adan>

What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking: Soups, Pickles, Preserves, Etc. by Abby Fisher, 1881

What the Slaves Ate: Recollections of African American Foods and Foodways By Herbert C. Covey, Dwight Eissnach

African Crops and Slave Cuisine by Joseph E. Holloway, Ph.D.
California State University Northridge

<http://www.charlestoncitypaper.com/charleston/a-brief-history-of-the-boiled-peanut/Content?oid=4738834>

African Crops and Slave Cuisine by Joseph E. Holloway, Ph.D.
California State University Northridge

News from the Phillips-Dawson House

As many of you know the work is never finished when you own an old home. But one project we're thrilled to have completed is the installation of protective UV filtering film on the windows of the Dawson House! UV rays from the sun cause damage to almost everything and by installing this filter we are now better able to protect our collections and begin to display more in the future. You won't notice the film if you look at the windows but believe us, it's there! Thank you to Atlantic Shoreline in Virginia Beach for a fast and friendly install!

In other news our annual Heirloom Sale fundraiser is now just days away (September 12-13)! This year we are featuring a beautiful bed, 2 marble-topped dressers, and mirror, along with our usual antiques and collectibles. All of our fundraisers go to support the continued efforts of the Historical Society but this fundraiser, in particular, has a more specific function. All of the proceeds from our Heirloom Sale go to support the Dawson House repairs and restorations. Just this year we've been able to renovate our new exhibit room, create a second office space for visitor and research use, and install our previously mentioned UV filters! All of these repairs are done with the best interests of our collections and our members in mind and we couldn't continue without your support.



We are also pleased to announce that local historian, Kermit Hobbs, has accepted a position on our Board of Directors. Welcome Kermit!

News from the Train Station



This July we sadly had to say goodbye to our wonderful Train Station Coordinator, Denise, as she heads out to new endeavors. Luckily, we were able to welcome a new Coordinator, Demi Naylor. In the words of one of her former co-workers, "Demi Naylor is a recent graduate from the University of Mary Washington with a Bachelor's degree in Historic Preservation. She has background working as the marketing coordinator for Historic St. Luke's Church Museum in Smithfield,

Virginia, and as a museum interpreter at Bacon's Castle in Surry. When she's not saving historic buildings or working at the Train Station you can find her singing in the choir at Main Street Methodist church, or curled up somewhere with a good book and a cup of tea." So please stop by to say hello and welcome her to the neighborhood!

The Train Station is also now on TripAdvisor and any feedback our visitors have for us is greatly appreciated and helps us provide a better visitor experience.

In exciting news the Train Station is looking to launch an e-newsletter to keep our members and visitors up-to-date on all Train Station events. If you're interested in joining their mailing list please email suffolktrainstation@verizon.net



Hands-On-History Day!

This year SNHS and the Train Station Museum held our very first Hands-On-History day where young and old alike were invited to learn more about railroading history here in Suffolk. Artifacts from the museum's education collection were available for guests to see and touch while games like a Train Station "Eye-Spy" kept everyone busy looking for clues to earn them their prize. Participants learned how Morse code was used to communicate in the days before telephones and we even had a Civil War camp set up to talk about the importance of the railroads to the war effort.



Thank you to everyone who came out and participated and especially our volunteers who braved the heat to make this day great! We can't wait to do it again next year!



Calendar of Events

September 12th	Heirloom Sale 137 Bank St. 9-3
September 13th	Heirloom Sale 137 Bank St. 1-4
October 3rd	Touch-a-Truck Sponsors & Volunteers Needed! Call 757-923-4750
October 11th	Fall Members' Meeting
December 5th	39th Annual Candlelight Tour
December 6th	39th Annual Candlelight Tour



Who Are We?

Can you identify any of the people pictured in these photographs? We have a wonderful collection of photographs here at the Historical Society, unfortunately too many of them have no identifying information. If you can give us any clues to who these people are you will be helping us immensely! Thank you!



Historical Society Wish List

The Suffolk-Nansemond Historical Society is a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization which means we rely on you, our members, to survive! Unfortunately running a business, even a nonprofit one, requires a lot of supplies and our limited budget means we don't always have everything we need. We've created a wish list of our most needed supplies and materials that, if you are interested and able, you can donate to our Society.

SNHS is a 501(c)3 organization and all donations, monetary or physical, are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Office Supplies:

- *Printer paper (ream or case)*
- *Epson Ink, #254 (BLK), #252 (CYMK)*
- *Scissors*
- *Postage Stamps*
- *Plain (#10) envelopes*
- *Legal pads*
- *#2 pencils*
- *Sharpies (all colors)*
- *Crayons*
- *Card Stock (all colors)*
- *Colored Pencils*

General Supplies:

- *Variable Speed Vacuum Cleaner*
- *Swiffer Dry Duster Cloths*
- *Cloth rags*
- *Broom and Dust Pan*
- *Trash Can Liners*
- *Insect sticky traps*
- *Toilet Paper*
- *3-Prong Extension Cord(s)*
- *Step Ladder*

Archival Supplies:

- *Gaylord 6-compartment Archival Artifact Tray*
- *Gaylord 1 1/2" O-Ring Preservation Box Album*
- *Gaylord Buffered Acid-Free Tissue (100 count)*
- *Gaylord White Ethafoam Planks (6-Pack)*
- *Cotton Twill Labeling Tape*
- *Gaylord Classic Archival Storage Carton with Handles*

We purchase our Archival Materials primarily from Gaylord Archival (www.gaylord.com) but some can be found in art supply stores as well.

If you wish to donate supplies, please either drop them off at our headquarters, 137 Bank St., Suffolk VA 23439, during business hours (M-Th, 9am to 4pm) or mail them to us at PO Box 1255. Please feel free to give us a call at 757-539-2781 if you have questions.

Are We There Yet?

Anyone traveling with children has likely heard this question a thousand times but did you know we hear it, too? Without a sign visible from the street many of our visitors don't know where we are! This year we plan to remedy this by having a new sign installed where everyone can see it! As you might guess, this will be an expensive project, but we feel an important one. If you agree, please consider donating to our Historical Society to help us show everyone where we are!

Thanks to our 2015 corporate members:

Phillips-Dawson Circle (\$5,000+)



Bank Street Circle (\$2,500+)



Birdsong PEANUTS

Nansemond Circle (\$1,000+)



FARMERS BANK
Community Banking Perfected

Tommy O'Connor

Suffolk Circle (\$500+)

LW's Lawn Service, LLC	
LeOtis Williams Manager	615 E. Pinner Street PO. Box 3285 Suffolk, VA 23439
Complete Landscaping Services	Phone (757) 925.0747
Licensed & Bonded	Fax (757) 925.4943
<small>"We don't mind working in the heat and our prices just can't be beat"</small>	

Seaboard Circle (\$250+)



Willis Suffolk, LLC

SNHS Board

Mary Austin Darden, President
Lynn Cross, Vice President
Art Robb, Treasurer
Tommy Arthur, Asst. Treasurer
Sandra Council
Kermit Hobbs
Lee King
Susan Musick
Ralph Nahra

PHS Board

Brian Donahue, President
Lee King, Vice President
Sue Woodward, Secretary
Darrell Cook

The Phillips-Dawson House



A Home for Local History

Street address: 137 Bank St., Suffolk, VA 23434

Mailing address: P. O. Box 1255, Suffolk VA 23439

Phone: 757-539-2781

Email: info@suffolkhistory.org

www.suffolkhistory.org

Nicole Lorenzen, Executive Director



Suffolk's Most Recognizable Landmark

Street address: 326 N. Main St., Suffolk, VA 23434

Mailing address: P. O. Box 1255, Suffolk, VA 23439

Phone: 757-923-4750

Demi Naylor, Train Station Manager

MRS. FISHER'S SWEET WATERMELON RIND PICKLE

Take the melon rind and scrape all the meat from the inside, and then carefully slice all the outside of rind from the white part of the rind, then lay or cover the white part over with salt. It will have to remain under salt one week before pickling; the rind will keep in salt from year to year. When you want to pickle it, take it from the salt and put into clear water, change the water three times a day - - must be changed say every four hours then take the rind from water and dry it with a clean cloth.

Have your vinegar boiling, and put the rind into it and let it scald four minutes, then take it off the fire and let it lay in vinegar four days; then take it from the vinegar, drain, and sprinkle sugar thickly over it and let it remain so one day. To make syrup, take the syrup from the rind and add eight pounds more sugar to it, and put to boil; boil till a thick and clear syrup. Weigh ten pounds of rind to twelve pounds of sugar; cover the rind with four pounds of it and make the syrup with the remaining eight pounds.

While the syrup is cooking add one teacupful of white ginger root and the peel of three lemons. When the syrup is cooked, then put the rind into the boiling syrup, and let it cook till you can pass a fork through it with ease, then it is done. When cooled put in jar or bottles with one pint of vinegar to one quart of syrup, thus the pickle is made. See that they be well covered with vinegar and syrup as directed.

Recipe from "What Mrs. Fisher Knows About Old Southern Cooking"

SUFFOLK NANSEMOND



HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P. O. Box 1255

Suffolk, Virginia 23439-1255

Return Service Requested

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SUFFOLK, VA
PERMIT NO. 24

